

Making Things Better Inside

January 21, 2012

It's a cold, rainy day outside. But here inside it's warm. You want to have that attitude not just for the meditation hall but also for yourself. The weather may be cold and wet and rainy, but the mind isn't cold, wet, and rainy. The mind doesn't have any direct contact with those things. It has contact through the senses and through your ideas about what's going on outside: how you filter things, what you pay attention to. If you pull the wetness and the coldness inside the mind, it's going to feel miserable. But you can leave those things outside. You have the choice of what you're going to focus on. You can focus on whatever sense of warmth there is in the body and breathe with that warmth. Allow the warmth to glow inside.

You'll find that the weather outside doesn't impinge on the mind nearly as much as it would if you were sitting there complaining about it.

So you can let it do its thing while you do your thing. Staying separate like this, you're fine. Whatever little discomfort there is in the body doesn't have to make huge inroads into the mind.

The Buddha makes the comparison with a person shot by an arrow. That's not bad enough, but the person shoots himself with another arrow. In other words, the first arrow is physical discomfort, physical pain. The second arrow is when the mind gets all worked up about the pain. Although usually that second arrow is not just one arrow. It's a third, fourth, fifth arrow.

Think about it for a minute: The Buddha was a member of the noble warrior caste and knew if that you're shot by an arrow, you have to lie very still. The less you move, the less the arrow's going to hurt. Whereas if you go through the effort of shooting yourself with another arrow, that's going to make the first arrow even worse. Sometimes shooting ourselves with the arrow is not enough. We start digging the arrow around in the wound. Things makes it even worse.

So you have to look at what your mind is doing to take the raw material of your experience and turn it into suffering—or learn how not turn it into suffering. That's a really important skill.

And it's important to realize that you have that choice. There are these two kinds of suffering: There's the suffering that just comes from the fact that we have a body. The body's constantly changing, and the situation around us is constantly changing. The body's hungry, gets cold, gets hot. That's the normal way of things.

But we don't have to suffer from it: because the second kind of suffering is the

one that's really important. It's the suffering that comes from our own craving and clinging and ignorance. That's what really brings suffering to the mind.

So fortunately, that's the one that we can put an end to. When we put an end to that, the minor discomforts outside are not going to be that big a deal. Even aging, illness, and death are not going to be that big a deal.

So we have to understand the extent to which we're taking a situation and making it worse. We also have to realize that we have the ability to develop the skills with which we can actually make things better inside. Even though the situation outside may not change, we can at least make things better inside.

We have that choice, and that skill is available. So it only makes sense that you choose to work on that skill, because it's the most important skill you can master.